

Nicaragua

I. Backward Peoples of a Troubled Land

By Hamilton Fyfe

Author of "The Real Mexico," etc.

NO one who has travelled through Nicaragua would deny the beauty of its scenery. No one who has lived in the country would throw doubt upon the riches which might be extracted from it. But nearly all would agree with the English bishop who described it as a "terrible country."

The Republic has a disastrously long tradition of lawlessness and civil war. It might almost be thought that the atrocities committed by the Spaniards who discovered and occupied what is now Nicaraguan territory put a curse upon it which has not been worked off yet. For many years after the conquest the natives were judged to be animals, not human beings, and were treated accordingly. A vast number were exterminated in battle; many more were kept for "sport," dogs being trained to hunt and kill them. It was not until the Pope published a Bull declaring these poor Indians to be "true men" that the brutal handling of them was modified. Reflecting on their misfortunes one can understand why it has been written that "if the devil reads history, his favourite work must be the conquest of America."

One result of the harrying of the native populations here and in other parts of Central America was that labour became scarce and negroes were brought from Africa to work in the plantations and the mines. There is still a considerable negro element in Nicaragua and its neighbours, some of it supplied in later times from the British West Indies. This cannot be said to have had a good effect either upon their social development or on their political struggles. The latter began in Nicaragua very soon after independence from Spain was proclaimed in 1821.

Most of the rulers of this troubled land have been men of small account, ignorant, self-seeking, and uncontrolled. Rather more unmannerly than most was the notorious President Zelaya, who declared at a moment when several Powers demanded compensation for some injury to their interests: "I ridicule Germany, I laugh at the United States, and upon England I spit." It was this refined diplomat who came into collision with the British Government over that part of Nicaragua which was at one time known as the Mosquito Coast.



NICARAGUAN SON OF THE SOIL
Of very mixed blood, Indian and Spanish predominating, the average Nicaraguan peon is a swarthy, rather dour man, whose social status is not far removed from serfdom



FIGHTING THE 'DREADED HOOKWORM UP COUNTRY IN NICARAGUA

Uncinariasis is the scientific name for a form of tropical anaemia caused by a parasite that thrives in a dirty, insanitary environment. Learning from the successful work of the American Sanitary Corps in the canal zone of Panama, enlightened Nicaraguan officials have established clinics in country districts where free treatment is provided for natives attacked by this scourge

This strip of territory on the Atlantic side of the Republic was claimed by a native ruler, and Great Britain supported his claim. For a while he was left undisturbed, but in 1860, what had been virtually a British protectorate was given up and the Nicaraguan authorities seized the "kingdom" and drove the "king" away. He lived on for many years as a pensioner of Great Britain.

There was much talk at one time of a Nicaraguan Canal as an alternative to the cut through Panama. The United States used this project as a means of quickening up the negotiations about the other. Now and again Managua, the capital, would get excited over the possibility, but serious people elsewhere did not give it much attention, and they were proved to be right.

Managua is a little town of red-tiled, colour-washed, mud-brick houses. Its lake-shore situation saves its external appearance from dullness; within, it is a riot of flowers. A railway runs from

here to Leon, a bigger town, but not a pleasanter, for in winter the streets are all mud, and in summer all dust. The place originally stood some distance from its present site, near a volcano, which destroyed a good part of it. The bishop who then ruled the population in the name of Spain saw that it was dangerous to remain. Another eruption might occur at any moment and the ruin of the town would be complete. He knew, however, that it would be of little avail to try to persuade the people to leave by an argument such as this. They were fatalists and would say that if nature meant them harm, it would be useless to make any attempt to outwit her.

So the bishop decided to work upon their religious feelings. Some years before a predecessor of his had been assassinated there. He now told the inhabitants that the volcano had been made inactive as a punishment for that crime. They must not defy the wrath of the Almighty; they ought at once

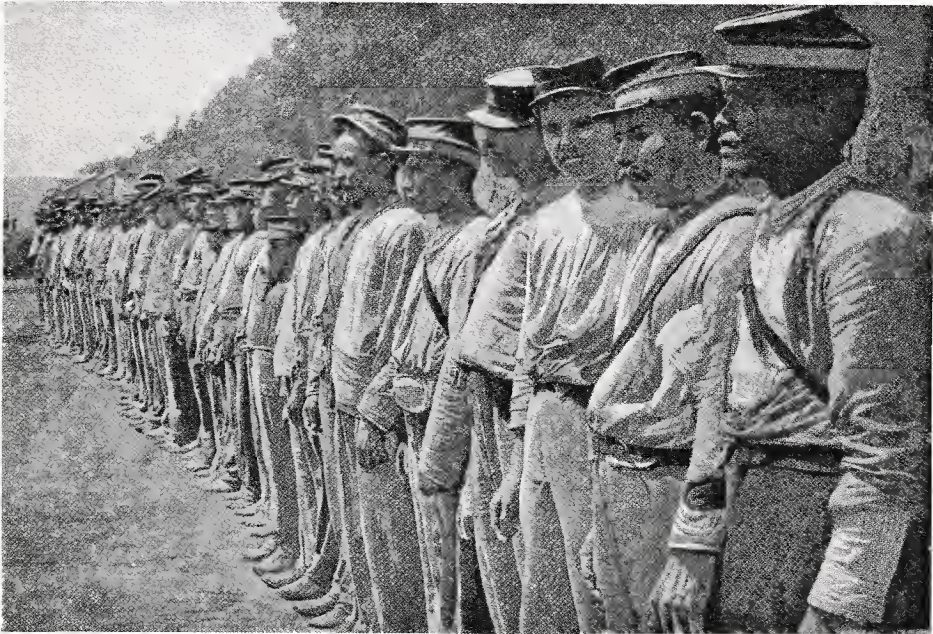
NICARAGUA & THE NICARAGUANS

to remove their city as He evidently intended them to do. The inhabitants, impressed by this argument, packed up at once and rebuilt their dwellings in a safer spot.

At the other end of the valley in which Leon stands is the ancient city of Granada, which comes next to Leon in commercial activity. The main highway of the state runs from here to Managua and Corinto, the principal seaport. Upon this travel the big, unwieldy wagons of antique design with their solid wheels of mahogany or some other hard wood, hewn into shape with the axe and weighing hundreds of pounds, and their rough leather coverings. Here may be seen riders mounted on small but spirited Nicaraguan horses, which can keep going all day at a pace which is between a trot and a walk, and never get tired. Nor does the rider; it is said that a man might carry a cup full of water for miles without spilling a single drop, so easy is the movement of the graceful, hardy little steeds.

There is great wealth of timber in the tropical forests, enough mahogany trees to keep the furniture makers busy for centuries. They are difficult to cut down in the country's present stage of development. Natives climb the highest trees on the outskirts of a swamp and pick out the mahogany tops by their colour, for this is the only tree which changes its colour with the seasons. When it has fallen the huge trunk is dragged by many, sometimes a hundred, yoke of oxen, to the nearest river: then it floats down to the saw-mill. Rubber could be gathered in great quantities and cacao cultivated with illimitable profit if there were any enterprise among the Nicaraguans. But they are disinclined to make any effort themselves and they have been prejudiced against foreigners.

The troubles of this backward and turbulent nation all grow out of the lack of education. Thirty years ago there were only sixty schools in the Republic, which provided places for



PARADE OF A VERY AWKWARD SQUAD OF NICARAGUAN CONSCRIPTS

Nicaragua's army comprises 2,000 men who serve one year with the colours. It is recruited from the Indians, theoretically by voluntary enlistment, but practically under official compulsion, and there is much room for improvement in its organization. The officers are young men of the wealthy class, whose adoption of a military career is largely influenced by its spectacular aspect



PRACTICAL LESSONS IN GROWING TOBACCO AT A NICARAGUAN AGRICULTURAL COLLEGE

Tobacco thrives in Nicaragua, and has long been grown for local consumption. Its cultivation for commercial purposes is now undertaken seriously, especially in the district round Masaya, and its manufacture into cigars and cigarettes is a rapidly growing industry. Scientific methods of its cultivation and treatment are taught in the agricultural schools, at one of which a large company of students is here shown receiving practical instruction in the weeding and maintaining of the tith, which are all-important between the times of transplantation and ripening of the plants



HOW THE NICARAGUANS KEEP A RELIGIOUS FIESTA IN MASAYA

On occasions of this kind the folk of Masaya do not let the religious reason of their festival interfere with their extremely noisy and hilarious enjoyment of the celebrations, and high spirits encouraged by much lifting of the elbow are the order of the day. Here a group of revellers in weird wooden masks are hastening to join their companions in the breathless joys of high carnival



ANCIENT MASKS OF WOOD ENLIVEN MODERN MERRYMAKERS

Some of these strange face-coverings that effectually conceal identity and must considerably heighten the wearers' temperatures, have probably been handed down from the initiates of pagan rites of which only the shadow has survived in the desire of the Nicaraguans for an occasional gala day. The practice of wearing masks which often imitate some supernatural being is one of the oldest of human conceits

Photos, Eugene Cunningham, "Gipsying in Central America," Fisher Unwin, Ltd



LOWLY CONTENTMENT IN PLEASANT RURAL SETTING

Thatched, tiled, and whitewashed, this homestead in the lacustrine region of Nicaragua makes a pleasing picture of rural charm, with the flowering shrubs growing luxuriantly before it. But the standard of life of the native population is low, and in respect of sanitation, and cultivation of garden or plot, the cottage homes give little evidence of house-pride as a Nicaraguan characteristic

less than two per thousand of the population. In 1900 only three out of every hundred children were being taught. Things have improved since then, but not a great deal. The results of undeveloped intelligence are seen in the pride, ignorance, intolerance, idleness and corruption which are still defects in the Nicaraguan character. Only very stupid people could have quarrelled and fought about the very merest trifles as they have done over and over again. Not many years ago it was, and may be still, possible to get up a violent dispute as to which of the three towns, Managua, Leon, and Granada,

was entitled to be the capital! Many of the Spaniards who form the aristocracy are sent to Europe to be educated. A number of them distinguish themselves in learning and literature. One of the leading writers of Spanish in recent times was a Nicaraguan. But they do very little to raise the level of intelligence and civilization. Women are still kept in a state of subjection. They are as strictly separated from men as if they were in a Turkish harem—except during one fortnight in the year. That comes towards the end of March. It is then the custom, following a very old Indian

NICARAGUA & THE NICARAGUANS

tradition, to make the excursion to the sea. Tents or bamboo huts used to be the rule for everybody. Now there are more luxurious quarters for the well-to-do. There is a great deal of bathing, mostly without bathing costumes, of course on separate parts of the shore. Generally the rigid rules of propriety which govern social intercourse during the rest of the year are relaxed.

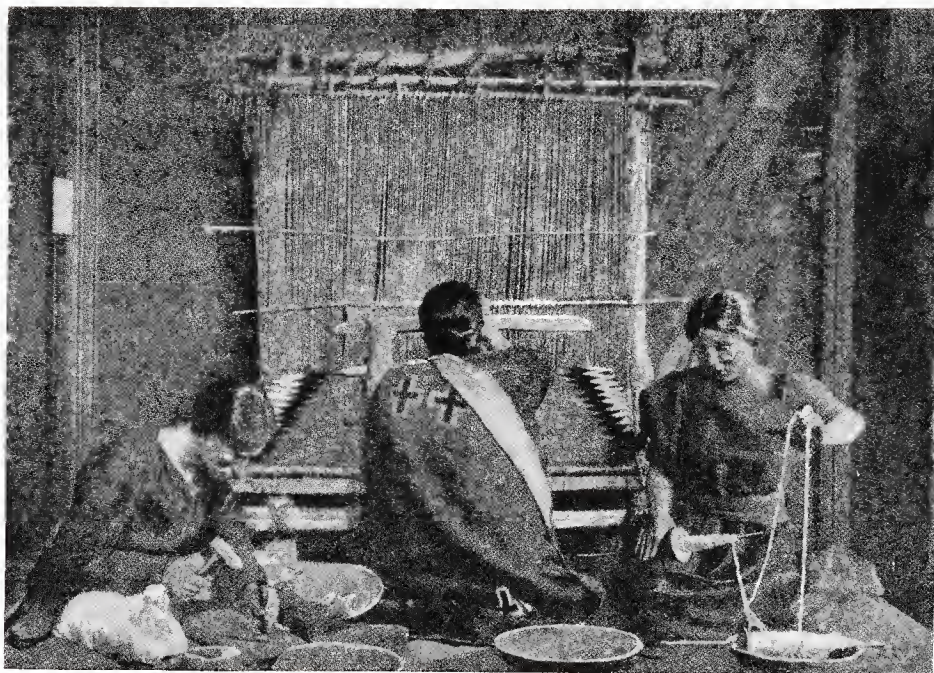
Women in the comfortable class live in complete idleness. There are a great many servants, therefore, in Nicaraguan

houses, but they seldom manage them cleverly, or even keep them clean. Households are apt to be large, for the wealthy usually have a number of dependents sheltering under their roofs, and are proud to act as benefactors to people who very often could quite well earn their own living if they chose to work. It used to be the custom for the master of the house to take his meals alone and be waited upon by his wife and daughters; this may be found the rule in certain households still. The



COMMERCIAL ACTIVITY ON THE LANDING-STAGE OF GRANADA

Occupying the site of the earlier city destroyed in 1855 by the notorious William Walker, Granada is once more a thriving town of Nicaragua. It stands on the north-western shore of Lake Nicaragua, by many travellers deemed the loveliest inland sheet of water in the world, and is its principal port, electric tramways connecting this landing-stage with the market a mile away



THREE FATE-LIKE WEAVERS OF THE MOSQUITO RESERVE

Mosquito is the sufficiently obvious European corruption of Misskito, the proper name of the Indians occupying the eastern littoral of Nicaragua. They are people of very considerable intelligence, and skilled in various crafts. These women, busy round their somewhat elaborate loom, are natives of the Mosquito Reserve, now incorporated in the Republic of Nicaragua as the department of Zelaya

sons of the wealthy despise most useful occupations and usually devote themselves to a "military career," which means wearing resplendent uniforms and drilling slipshod natives in dirty, ragged ones. The enlistment of the latter is supposed to be voluntary, but the reality was exposed when some provincial official forwarded a batch of volunteers and wrote: "If you want any more, please return the ropes with which these are tied."

The Indians, from whom the army is recruited are a decent, stolid, silent folk, who wrap themselves in a sombre dignity and even when they get drunk, which is as often as they can afford it, are quiet in their cups. Half-breeds are often quarrelsome, and the negroes become offensive when they have drink in them; the Indian takes his liquor "like a gentleman." He is industrious when he works for himself, but seldom considers it incumbent on him to do his best for an employer. He wears

very little clothing and has very little sense. So long as he is able to grow bananas, plantains, yams, and maize, which he can do with next to no exertion, and so long as he has cigarettes to smoke, he is content.

The children are bright, but if they go to school, the brightness is soon crushed out of them by the mechanical chanting of their lessons, and if they do not go to school, they become animals, gentle as a rule and kindly (the women can tame birds by coaxing and petting them), but savage and cruel when their passions are inflamed. That the country, though wild, and some of it still unexplored, is safe to travel in proves that they are not inclined to theft or violence.

They keep up their ancient ways, cook their food as their ancestors did five centuries ago, make their own clothes, spinning and dyeing the cotton and weaving it into a pattern like Scottish tartan. They are insensitive to bodily

NICARAGUA & THE NICARAGUANS

pain, and not less to emotional jars. Thus an old woman whose husband had nearly killed her was found sitting by him after he had been tied up as a punishment. She was so accustomed to being with him that she could not bear to leave his side.

Most of the peons are in debt to their employers, which makes them in reality slaves, for so long as they owe money on a plantation they cannot leave it. This does not indeed trouble them much, for they do not like moving, and almost everybody in the country, of whatever station, is used to being in debt. It does not worry

them any more than living among volcanoes.

Of these there are a great many: thirteen can be counted from one church tower in Leon; and they give unpleasant signs pretty often that they are by no means extinct. Every year they are solemnly "baptised" by priests who climb up and throw holy water into the craters. Only one has never been climbed, the giant called Momotombo. Once some priests started up its desolate slopes; they were never heard of again.

But it is not nature which has been Nicaragua's worst enemy: it is Man.



SLOW-MOVING WHEELS OF COMMERCE IN OLD-WORLD MASAYA

Many traces of old Spanish domination and influence survive in Masaya, as, for example, this imposing Spanish market. Wagons like that seen in the foreground are still in common use in the country, unwieldy vehicles of immense weight on solid wheels rough-hewn out of the mahogany that grows in profusion in the forests of the plateau region, and drawn by lethargic oxen

Nicaragua

II. Its Four Centuries of War and Dissension

By Percy F. Martin

Author of "Through Five Republics of South America"

FORMING, on its western border, the very centre of volcanic energy in Central America, Nicaragua, since history began, has always been notorious for its many and disastrous earthquakes and eruptions. From the volcanoes, Chonco El Viéjo (quiescent since 1684), Coseguina (notorious for its terrific eruption in 1835), Santa Clara, Telica, San Jacinto, Rota, Las Pilas (eruption in 1850), Asososco, and Momotombo (eruptions in 1870 and 1886), there is always a possibility of further seismic trouble.

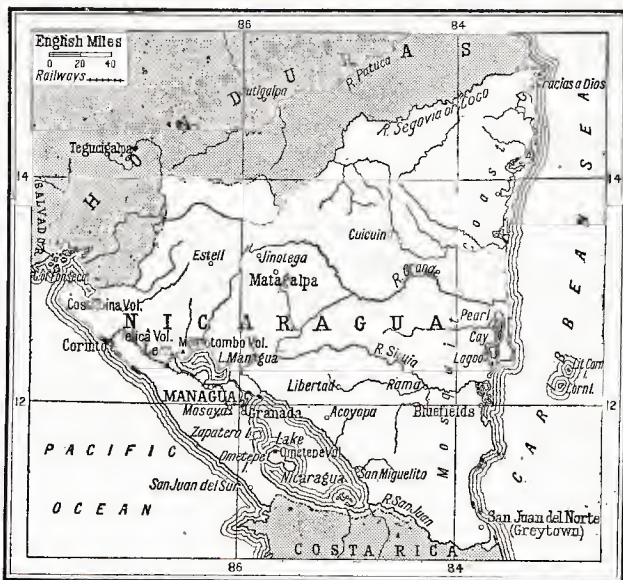
From the roof of one church in the capital thirteen volcanoes can be seen; but most of them have been without movement for hundreds of years. The country is seamed with mountain ranges, large rivers rising in their centre and emptying into the Caribbean Sea, such as the Segovia (or Coco), the Kurringwas, and the Bluefields (or Mico). The San Juan flows from the Lake of Nicaragua to the sea, and in parts forms the boundary with Costa Rica on the south. If a Nicaraguan Canal should ever be constructed as an addition (but not as a rival) to that of Panama, this waterway will form part of the route.

Including the Mosquitia Reserve (9,200 square miles)—a British protectorate, but no longer so claimed—Nicaragua contains an area of 49,200 square miles. Its population does not exceed 650,000, three-fourths of whom—mostly of Indian or Spanish descent—reside in the western half of the state; negroes, originally from the adjoining islands, adhere to the eastern half. While more rain falls on the eastern side in a single month than in some of the adjacent territories in a year, on the western side the wet and dry seasons are more clearly defined. Unpleasant north-east winds, sometimes exceedingly rough and dangerous to navigation on the lakes, blow almost all the year round.

The political history of Nicaragua has been stormy.

Discovered by Columbus in 1502, two decades passed before any system of Spanish government was attempted. Gil Gonzalez Dávila—first representative of the Spanish monarch—proved both cruel and treacherous, his aggressive policy contrasting with the peaceable character—until aroused by persistent ill-treatment—of the natives. Incorporated after conquest in the immense viceroyalty of Guatemala, which embraced then practically the whole of Central America, the first settlement, Granada, was established in 1524; and the second, Leon, in 1610, ravaged by the buccaneer William Dampier in 1685. The Spaniards derived great wealth from the mines, and exported largely the country's agricultural produce. Viceroy and governors continued to rule until 1821, when independence of the Spanish crown was declared.

Thereafter Nicaragua became a member of the Federal Union of the Five States of Central America, but seceded in 1839, and almost at once commenced to war with her neighbours. Internecine struggles between Leon Liberals and Granada Conservatives endured for years, giving opportunities for the intervention of adventurers like William Walker, a buccaneer of American nationality.



THE REPUBLIC OF NICARAGUA

NICARAGUA & ITS STORY

Walker was a man of reckless and forcible character, who undertook in 1855 to raise a foreign legion and bring it to the aid of those who were trying to upset the government in Nicaragua. He was not able to take the field with more than a handful of men, but his daring and skill snatched one success after another until finally he became President.

Overtaken by a revolution, Walker escaped to the United States, where he openly set to work to organize an expedition against the government which had superseded his own. With a collection of desperadoes like himself he took ship, but did not succeed in reaching the country he had conquered and ruled. He was obliged to put into a port belonging to Honduras, and there he surrendered to the commander of a British gunboat. Either misunderstanding the nature of the surrender, or in flagrant breach of his word, the officer handed Walker over to the Honduran authorities, and he was at once shot, to avoid any further trouble.

The first stable government was that of President Chamorro (1875); trouble with Germany caused anxiety, and disputes with Great Britain followed on the arrest of the Consul at Bluefields (Mr. Hatch), a British squadron occupying Corinto port until an indemnity of \$15,000 was collected.

A comparatively peaceful period marked General Zavala's term as President (1879-1883), but turmoil prevailed during that of his successor, Dr. Cárdenas. Numerous conflicts between Nicaragua and its neighbours, Costa Rica and El Salvador, on the one hand, and with Guatemala and Honduras on the other, resulted in the signing of the Peace of April 11, 1885.

Boundary disputes threatened to renew hostilities, but a further treaty was signed through the offices of the President of the United States.

For the third or fourth time the question of a union between the five Central American countries was mooted, but the President (Dr. Roberto Sacasa), who proposed it, was deposed from office. The revolutionist, General José Zelaya, became President in 1894, and served three terms until 1909. He held the country under terrorism for several years, embroiling it with its neighbours and bringing about financial disaster. Becoming virtual dictator Zelaya compelled his own re-election, thus violating the constitutional laws of the country.

The United States became involved in 1909, owing to the arrest and execution of two American citizens; warships were despatched, upon which Zelaya fled to Mexico, only to be succeeded by his political henchman Madriz. The United States succeeded in compelling his resignation, finding a more acceptable and amenable president in Adolfo Díaz, with whom was concluded a highly favourable treaty (1914) conferring perpetual rights over Nicaraguan territory for a possible second isthmian canal, and thus for ever excluding all possible foreign competition with the Panama waterway.

Shortly afterwards a state of siege was declared owing to a popular revolt against President Díaz' open espousal of United States policy of interfering with the domestic affairs of the Latin American countries, and an unsuccessful attempt was made to assassinate Señor Díaz. He retired, and was succeeded by General Emiliano Chamorro.

NICARAGUA: FACTS AND FIGURES

The Country

Republic of Central America bounded north by Honduras and Salvador, south by Costa Rica, east by the Caribbean Sea, and west by the Pacific. Hinterland of east coast consists of an alluvial plain rising to group of mountains running through centre of country, in places 7,000 feet high. Lake Nicaragua lies to the south-west, with a length of some 110 miles and an area of nearly 3,000 square miles, and to the north of it lies Lake Managua, to which it is joined by the Tipitapa river. The region round the lakes is volcanic, Ometepe being eruptive. The population, chiefly consisting of Spaniards, Indians, and half-breeds in the west, and Indians and negroes in the east, totals about 650,000, the area of the whole state being about 49,000 square miles. Religion, mainly Roman Catholic.

Government and Constitution

Republic divided into thirteen departments and two comarcas (territories), including the Mosquito Coast Reserve, under President elected for four years, in whom is vested executive authority. Legislative authority dispensed by Congress of two houses of forty deputies elected for four years by universal suffrage, and thirteen Senators appointed for six years.

Commerce and Industries

Development of agriculture hindered by lack of labour; bananas, tobacco, cocoa, coffee, beans, and sugar-cane being among the main crops. Considerable forests contain cedar and mahogany, gums, medicinal plants, and dye-woods, and gold and silver mines are worked, while there are also deposits of precious stones and copper. The republic supports over a million cattle. Imports mainly cotton, wheat, and steel and iron, totalled £2,772,877 in 1920, and exports of which coffee, bananas, hides and skins, and sugar were the chief, £2,157,669 for same year. Official standard coin, the gold cordoba, nominal value 4s. 2d.

Communications

The Pacific Railroad of Nicaragua measures about 170 miles from Corinto to Lake Nicaragua, and there are some twenty miles of private railway. Good roads are few. Telegraph wire aggregates about 3,600 miles, and telephone wire about 800.

Chief Towns

Managua, capital (estimated population 60,300), Leon (47,000), Granada (22,000), Matagalpa (32,300), Masaya (17,300), Jinotega (17,000).



NEW FACES IN OLD SURROUNDINGS: THE TWENTIETH CENTURY PEEPING FROM THE BALCONY OF AN OLD NORWEGIAN HOME
The quaint customs and costumes of the Hardanger people are little by little being ousted by modern ways and styles, but there are many staunch advocates of the feminine orthodox garb who continue to don the attractive national dress. In similar fashion the old log farmsteads are rapidly disappearing before the more modern constructions of brick and stone; but ever and anon one encounters a timeworn building of unique and peculiar charm, stained by the years to a rich brown colouring, and rife with the romantic memories of a past and forgotten age